

RESEARCH BRIEF

# The Relationship Between Personality and Turnover Intention Among Academicians of Private Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia: Boredom at Workplace as Mediator

Michael Teng, Zaiton Hassan,\* and Mark Kasa  
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak  
\*hzaiton@unimas.my

A substantial number of studies in organizational development seem to emphasize on two opposite side of employees' well-being at the workplace—positive and negative. Although the positive aspect of work, such as engagement and flow, is considered new, negative symptoms, such as job burnout, happen to dominate the research area. Boredom is negative well-being that deteriorates organizations (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2014). Boredom is the state of “disconnection” of an individual in terms of cognition, emotion, and physical strength, aside from lacking in interest, passion, and attention towards a job under a non-stimulating working environment (Teng, Hassan, & Kasa, 2016). Emerging findings reported across many nations portray that boredom tends to dampen organizational development by negatively affecting one's health status (Harju, Hakanen, & Schaufeli, 2014), job performance (Watt & Hargis, 2010), job satisfaction (Spector & Fox, 2010), emotion (Culp, 2006), attendance (Kass, Vodanovich, & Callender, 2001), well-being (Sommers & Vodanovich, 2000), and monetary loss (Eddy, D'Abate, & Thurston, 2010).

Boredom is commonly related to the monotonous workload, mental under load, poor utilization of skills, and absence of meaning (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2014) that stimulates the feeling of getting bored. As depicted

in the job demands-resources (JD-R) theory, employee well-being is influenced by the disparity of job demands and resources. High job demands result in job burnout (Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2003; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007), which in turn, lead to poor organizational commitment and turnover intention (Hakanen, Schaufeli, & Ahola, 2008). On the other hand, high job resources promote positive organizational outcomes via work engagement (Bakker et al., 2010; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). It has been predicted that boredom most probably occurs when employees work under poor job demands and resources environment (Reijseger et al., 2013).

Mercer-Lynn, Bar, and Eastwood (2014) claimed that apart from organization and work level demands and resources, boredom is related to one's personality traits. Every individual has different tolerance levels towards boredom. For instance, extroverts are more outgoing and therefore, have greater tolerance towards boredom and vice-versa. Certain personality traits seem to correlate with turnover intention and the actual turnover (Zimmerman, 2008). However, only a handful of studies have investigated personality as an antecedent of boredom. With that, this present study investigated individual personalities, particularly extroverts and neurotics, as well as their relationships

with boredom, and if boredom mediates the correlation between personality and turnover intention among Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) academicians.

In this study, academicians are the focal point of investigation because boredom is widespread; not only among blue-collar employees but also among the white collar (Heijden, Schepers, & Nijssen, 2012). Based on the literature, boredom has been scarcely assessed among academicians, except Sohail, Ahmad, Tanveer, and Tariq (2012), who extended the investigation to university lecturers in seeking the association of boredom against demographic factors. Meanwhile, others focused on blue-collar employees (Kass et al., 2001), white-collar employees (Harju et al., 2014), teachers (Daschmann, Goetz, & Stupnisky, 2014), students (Yazdanparast, Joseph, & Qureshi, 2015), and drivers (Heslop, 2014). The actual turnover among academicians in PHEIs in Malaysia was reported to be in a critical stage (Hashim & Mahmood, 2011). In 2013, the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2015) recorded a shortfall of 8,516 academicians in PHEIs. This is a huge loss for the Ministry as they had recorded a consistent upraise in the number of academicians prior to the downfall. Although the numbers seem to grow these recent years, PHEIs are facing shortage of academicians due to the large influx of students pursuing their tertiary education. It gives rise to the question of probable boredom as a reason for academicians to leave their job. Hence, this paper expands the JD-R theory by bridging personality trait as an antecedent in relation to boredom and turnover intention, particularly within the Malaysian context.

Extroversion is a positive personality trait. Employees with high extroversion are those who are linked with positive effects, sociability, optimism, and personal energy (Costa & McCrae, 1992). They tend to demonstrate high enthusiasm and, most of the time, being active results in greater tendency to experience positive emotions. Extroverts perceive challenging work positively and rewarding due to more favorable working conditions (Bakker et al., 2010), coupled with energized and fun-loving features (McCrae & Costa, 2003). Empirically, extroversion is linked to positive performance outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002), organizational commitment (Bakker et al., 2010), and work engagement (Langelaan, Bakker, Doornen, & Schaufeli, 2006). Hence, extroverts are less likely to

experience burnout and boredom (Bakker, Van der Zee, Lewig, & Dollard, 2006). With that, we hypothesize that

H<sub>1</sub>: Academician with extroversion is negatively associated with boredom.

Neuroticism is a negative personality trait with high-stress sensitivity (Suls, 2001). Employees with high neuroticism are those who are associated with negative effects, inability to cope with stress and pressure, as well as emotional instability (Costa & McCrae, 1992); while those with low level of neuroticism tend to behave positively in terms of being more engaged (Warr & Inceoglu, 2012), less bored, and less burnout (Alarcon, Eschleman, & Bowling, 2009). Spector, Zapf, Chen, and Frese (2000) reported that individuals with high neuroticism perceive challenging work as threatening and tend to view the world negatively. Such characteristic has predetermined that neuroticism is correlated with negative performance outcomes, such as in psychological distress, job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2002), and health impairment (Bakker et al., 2010). Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

H<sub>2</sub>: Academician with neuroticism is positively associated with boredom.

In this present context, boredom is a negative state of well-being that boosts negative outcomes, such as deteriorating job performance (Watt & Hargis, 2010), low satisfaction (Kass et al., 2001), high absenteeism (Wan, Downey, & Stough, 2014), and poor organizational commitment (Van Wyk, De Beer, Pienaar, & Schaufeli, 2016), despite of the positive views on boredom, such as a session for refreshment and generation of new ideas (Belton & Priyadharshini, 2007). Therefore, as far as the boredom literature is concerned we hypothesize that:

H<sub>3</sub>: Boredom is positively related to turnover intention.

Prior studies have documented that employees with extroversion are closely linked to positive outcomes, such as higher job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2002) and better organizational commitment (Bakker et al., 2010). Langelaan et al. (2006) asserted that extroversion is positively associated with work engagement (Brief & Weiss, 2002). Such findings infer that extroversive

personality is less susceptible to boredom at the workplace. Pekrun (2006) claimed that well-being is a response displayed by employees after appraising an event and a situation that reflects good control and exceptional value. Employees with extroverted personality are positive, energized, active, and fun-loving (McCrae & Costa, 2003). These traits nurture optimal positive well-being (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002) in dealing with challenging tasks as they value their job and are in control. Due to such personality, boredom is most unlikely to occur. This is supported by O'Hanlon (1981), who discovered that extroverts have a lower level of boredom at the workplace, in comparison to introverts. Across time, it lowered turnover intention. Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

H<sub>4</sub>: Boredom at workplace mediates the relationship between extroverted personality and turnover intention.

Previous studies have documented that employees with neuroticism are closely related to negative outcomes, such as psychological distress (Hart, Wearing, & Headey, 1995), job dissatisfaction (Judge et al., 2002), and health impairment (Bakker et al., 2010). Burisch (2002), De Vries, and Van Heck (2002), and Langelaan et al. (2006) revealed that neuroticism is positively linked with burnout. Such findings deduce that a neurotic personality is more susceptible to boredom at the workplace. Employees with neurotic personality prefer interpreting events negatively and have lower tolerance towards a challenging event (Spector et al., 2000). Hence, such personality is most likely to experience boredom at the workplace and across time, initiates turnover intention. Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

H<sub>5</sub>: Boredom at the workplace mediates the relationship between neurotic personality and turnover intention.

The conceptual framework of the study is illustrated in Figure 1.

## Methods

This study adopted the quantitative approach and employed an adapted questionnaire for data collection. The items embedded in the questionnaire were extracted from a range of sources that fulfilled the minimum threshold of reliability score and convergent validity. *Boredom at workplace* was measured by using the Dutch Boredom Scale with eight single-factor items (e.g., "I am bored with my job"; 1 = *never* to 7 = *always*;  $\alpha = 0.83$ ). *Turnover intention* was measured by using five items with five-point Likert scale (e.g., "I am seriously thinking about quitting my job"; 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = 0.89$ ). This study applied five items to measure a construct where Baron and Kenny (1986) claimed as the most optimum measurement ratio. *Extroversion* and *Neuroticism* were adopted from John and Srivastava (1999) and measured using five-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*). The constructs were arranged alternately to minimize the common method variance issue through instrument design (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Each construct was represented with numerous items to ensure a comprehensive evaluation while hindering the shortcomings of using a single-item measurement.

A total of 799 self-administered questionnaires were distributed through both online and mail post to academicians working at 20 PHEIs located at Sarawak. At the end of the data collection, 279 questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 36.2%. The sample was comprised of 70.7% females and 29.3% male. A total of 48.7% of them were married, 49.8% were singles, and the remaining had been divorced/separated/widowed. In terms of academic qualification, 48.7% of the respondents had a bachelor's degree,

### INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Personality Traits

- Extroversion
- Neuroticism

H<sub>1</sub> & H<sub>2</sub> →

Boredom

H<sub>4</sub> & H<sub>5</sub>

H<sub>3</sub> →

Turnover Intention

### DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

whereas 38.4% held a master’s degree, and the rest (12.9%) possessed a doctorate degree (Ph.D.). Lecturers made up 82.4% of the total respondents, and the others were professors, associate professors, senior lecturers, and others (tutors, instructors, junior lecturers). Most of the respondents (54.8%) had a monthly income below RM 2,999. Nearly 31.5% of the respondents have been working as an academician for more than seven years. Besides, 30.5% of the respondents have been serving their current institutions between 1 and 3 years.

The data were analyzed using Smart PLS 3.0 to perform hypotheses testing. Several rounds of iteration were conducted to determine the reliability of the indicators via composite reliability (CR) with a threshold value of 0.7 (Litwin, 1995). The validity

of the indicators was determined through convergent validity (average variance extracted, AVE) and discriminant validity (cross-loading). AVE with a value exceeding 0.5 is acceptable (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011), whereas the cross-loading value should be higher than that for other constructs (Chin, 1998). In this study, all the indicators fell within the acceptable range.

## Results

The outputs revealed that extroversion displayed a significantly negative ( $\beta = -0.183$ ,  $p < 0.025$ ) relationship with boredom at the workplace (see Table 1). Specifically, academicians with extrovert personality tend to experience less boredom. Thus,

**Table 1**

*Path Coefficients for Inner Model*

Path	Path coefficient	Standard deviation	t-statistics
Extroversion → Boredom	-0.183*	0.050	3.634
Neuroticism → Boredom	0.359*	0.054	6.599
Boredom → Turnover Intention	0.460*	0.059	7.869

\*Significant level at  $p < 0.025$

**Table 2**

*Indirect Effects*

Path	Indirect effect (a*b)	Standard deviation	t-Statistics
Extroversion → Turnover intention	-0.085*	0.025	3.386
Neuroticism → Turnover intention	0.166*	0.035	4.748

\*Significant level at  $p < 0.025$

**Table 3**

*Direct Effects*

Path	Direct effect (c')	Standard deviation	t-Statistics
Extroversion → Turnover intention	0.033 <sup>ns</sup>	0.045	0.790
Neuroticism → Turnover intention	0.143*	0.055	2.587

\*Significant level at  $p < 0.025$ ; <sup>ns</sup> not significant

$H_1$  is supported. On the contrary, neuroticism was positively associated with boredom at the workplace ( $\beta=0.359, p<0.025$ ), signifying that academicians with neuroticism personality tend to experience more boredom. Therefore,  $H_2$  is supported.

Boredom was positively linked with turnover intention among academicians. The more frequent academicians encountered boredom at the workplace, the greater their turnover intention. The relationship between boredom and turnover intention was significant, thereby supporting  $H_3$  ( $\beta=0.460, p<0.025$ ).

As for the mediation effect, boredom seemed to mediate the indirect path coefficient for the correlations between extroversion and turnover intention ( $\beta=-0.085, p<0.025$ ), as well as between neuroticism and turnover intention ( $\beta=0.166, p<0.025$ ; see Table 2).

## Discussion

The study outcomes indicate that extroversion is negatively associated with boredom at the workplace. Extroversion is a positive personality trait that is closely linked to positive effects, sociability, optimism, and personal energy (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Thus, they tend to demonstrate high enthusiasm and are active in the workplace, which results in greater job involvement and development of positive emotions. As extroverts view challenging work positively and rewarding, such characteristics are linked to positive performance outcomes, such as higher job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2002), better organizational commitment (Bakker et al., 2010), and enhanced work engagement (Langelaan et al., 2006). Extroverts are the key players in solving problems through experience. They also initiate the development of a positive working attitude among the members. Therefore, it is unlikely for extroverts to feel bored at the workplace as they are described as sociable, optimistic, and energized (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

On the other hand, academicians with neuroticism appeared to have a significantly positive relationship with boredom at the workplace. Academicians with such negative personality are prone to feel bored with their job as such characteristics are highly correlated with negative organizational outcomes (Judge et al., 2002; Bakker et al., 2010). Academicians with neuroticism are linked to negative effects, inability to cope with stress and pressure, as well as emotionally unstable (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Such academicians

view the world negatively and regard a challenging task as a threat instead of an opportunity to unleash their skills and potential. They have low tolerance in dealing with challenging tasks, hence, avoid such scenarios. They have ample time doing nothing, thus giving rise to boredom at workplace. The results also revealed a positive relationship between boredom at the workplace and turnover intention. This points out that highly bored academicians have greater turnover intention. This finding supports reports from prior studies by Kass et al. (2001) and Reijseger et al. (2013). These bored academicians feel demotivated in their work because they have lost their passion. Even with a more demanding job, they remain bored, fail to cope with the changes, and I choose to leave their profession, instead of struggling. This concludes that boredom may eventually lead to turnover intention.

The findings exhibited that boredom mediated the relationship between extroversion and turnover intention. As depicted in JD-R theory, any event that leads employees to positive performance, positive well-being is present. Within this present context, extroverts seemed to possess attention-seeking and domineering attitudes that engender positive well-being. Thus, one is less likely to get bored at the workplace, and the possibility of having the intention to quit is minimized. Boredom was found to mediate the direct relationship between neuroticism and turnover intention. Meaning, academicians with stronger neurotic personality traits are highly prone to get bored at the workplace and hence, increase the possibility of intending to quit their job. This is because academicians with neurotic personality traits do not view the world in a positive manner. Spector et al. (2000) asserted that neurotics interpret most of the events negatively and have low tolerance towards job challenges.

This study portrays that extroversion and neuroticism are among the factors that influence boredom at the workplace and turnover intention among academicians in Malaysia. To address this issue, the management in PHEIs has to look into the issue of neuroticism personality among academicians. Academicians with such personality are prone to experience boredom at the workplace and increase the possibility of turnover intention. With some academicians viewing the world negatively, it is advisable for the management in PHEIs to identify those neurotics and to group them separately. The best approach is to place them among the extroverts. A study by Mas and Moretti (2009)

has proven that productivity increases tremendously with the introduction of highly productive employees into a shift. This means that positive workers may motivate the group to perform positively as emotion is contagious. Therefore, upon socializing and closely working with extroverts, it is expected that neurotic academicians will change their negative perception towards their profession.

In summary, both extroversion and neuroticism appear to be the determinants of boredom at the workplace associated with turnover intention among academicians at PHEI in Sarawak. The present study suggests that the PHEIs management needs to identify academicians with neurotic personality trait in their organizations and group them with the extroverts. By allowing the extroverts to influence those neurotics, it is hoped that the positive vibe could change their level of tolerance towards challenging tasks and hence, minimize boredom and turnover intention.

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### Declaration of ownership

This report is our original work.

### Conflict of interest

None.

### Ethical clearance

The study was approved by the institution.

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